

Washington, DC -- The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (H.R. 6003) today, authorizing funding for Amtrak and improving and expanding passenger rail service nationwide, including amendments sponsored by U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) to directly address New York State's rail infrastructure needs.

"With gas prices increasing daily and local families struggling to afford sky-rocketing commuter costs, rail expansion and improvement must be a top priority," **said Arcuri, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee**

. "Improving our rail infrastructure and service must be part of our long-term transportation strategy to effectively decrease our nation's reliance on finite fossil fuels, help local families with transportation costs and foster economic development where we need it most. Developing our rail system is a critical part of a long-term energy fix."

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 would authorize \$2.5 billion in grants over five years for intercity passenger rail, funding an increasingly necessary transportation alternative that will decrease commuter costs and travel times, as well as decrease dependence on foreign oil and improve the environment. By improving and expanding passenger rail, this bill creates alternatives for commuters hit by record high fuel prices and increasingly congested airports and highways.

Arcuri worked with colleagues from both parties, as well as Governor Paterson's office, to ensure the Northeast Corridor and New York's unique rail needs were addressed in the bill. By authorizing \$4.2 billion for Amtrak capital grants through 2013, H.R. 6003 would help to repair the Northeast Corridor, including rail service in New York, and procure new rolling stock, rehabilitate bridges, and provide capital improvements and maintenance over its entire network. Arcuri also offered amendments, which were incorporated into the bill's comprehensive Manager's Amendment, to improve passenger rail service in New York State.

H.R. 6003 includes authorization for \$3.0 billion to Amtrak for operating grants through 2013, helping Amtrak pay salaries, health costs, fuel costs, overtime pay, and train and facilities maintenance.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission recommended

that the U.S. establish a high-speed rail network spanning the entire country. H.R. 6003 would authorize \$1.75 billion for grants to States and/or Amtrak to finance the construction and equipment for 11 authorized high-speed rail corridors.

It would also alleviate rail “choke points” by providing \$520 million over four years in congestion grants to States and Amtrak for high-priority rail corridors to reduce congestion and facilitate ridership growth.

By subjecting Amtrak to the Buy America Act, H.R. 6003 would ensure that Amtrak purchases high-quality American goods and provides jobs for U.S. workers.

A copy of Arcuri’s floor speech in support of H.R. 6003, as prepared for delivery, is attached below:

**U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24)
In the House of Representatives
Rule for Consideration of H.R. 6003
House Resolution 1253**

June 10, 2008

I thank my Rules Committee colleague for yielding.

I would like to thank Chairman Oberstar, Chairwoman Brown, and Ranking Members Mica and Shuster for their bipartisan leadership on the Amtrak legislation we will consider today.

There has been much discussion about the condition of our nation’s transportation system and the growing pressures it faces from all sides: skyrocketing costs of fuel and maintenance; increased congestion from growing demand; and, global climate change.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act will take tremendous strides towards addressing these pressures by continuing our commitment to Amtrak and passenger rail service. Maintenance costs will continue to hinder us, but expanding and improving passenger rail service has the potential to relieve congestion – both on our highways and in the skies – by offering passengers a viable alternative. A shift toward rail can also reduce the harmful emissions generated by our transportation system.

For too long Amtrak has been twisting in the political winds of Capitol Hill prerogatives. If we're to have a robust and successful system that users can rely on, then we must make a bipartisan commitment to supporting Amtrak. We cannot waver on this commitment and expect to keep pace with the national rail systems of other developed countries around the world.

Partisan bickering has hurt Amtrak's overall state of repair. In fact, the Department of Transportation's Inspector General concluded that, "Despite multiple efforts over the years to change Amtrak's structure and funding, we have a system that limps along, is never in a state-of-good-repair, awash in debt, and perpetually on the edge of collapse."

Amtrak's maintenance backlog is a major impediment to its success. In recent years, Amtrak's ridership has grown at a modest, but continuing rate; and Amtrak's on-time performance has declined down to an on-time arrival rate of 67.8 percent. The Department of Transportation's Inspector General has stated that Amtrak's continued deferral of maintenance increases the risk of a major failure on its system. Currently, Amtrak has an estimated \$6 billion in backlogged capital maintenance needs, including \$4 billion on the Northeast Corridor – its most profitable line.

I would gladly take the train home to my Upstate New York district, or from my home in Utica to New York City, but currently that is not a viable option because of the unreliability of Amtrak service.

Deferred track maintenance, especially in Upstate New York, has required lowering the speed limits on significant portions of track. In addition, competition with freight carriers for priority on the track causes Amtrak trains to become seriously delayed to the point where train schedules are simply unreliable. The on-time arrival rate between Albany and Buffalo is a mere 42 percent, meaning that less than half of all trains arrive on-time.

Unfortunately, for many hardworking Americans, passenger rail is the only viable option for travel because of record high gas prices. Amtrak ridership between Buffalo and Albany, New York, through my hometown of Utica, is currently up 21 percent. Improving passenger rail service must be part of our long-term transportation strategy, if we expect to effectively decrease our nation's reliance on finite fossil fuels, and allow Americans to get to and from work on-time without breaking the bank each month.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act will aggressively address these concerns.

I encourage all my colleagues to vote for this rule and the underlying bill, and to continue to support a viable passenger rail option for our nation.

Thank you, I yield back the balance of my time.

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